



The Clubhouse Model

How clubhouses can complement
supportive housing



NATIONAL CENTER FOR
**HOUSING
+ HEALTH**

**FOUNTAIN
HOUSE**

Introduction

While supportive housing is highly effective at addressing homelessness for people with complex needs, including those living with **serious mental illness**, many tenants continue to experience social isolation and loneliness once housed. Addressing these

social needs is critical for long-term mental health recovery. This document is designed to help supportive housing audiences learn the basics about clubhouses and how supportive housing and clubhouses can be mutually supportive.



The clubhouse model offers a collaborative, restorative environment that supports clubhouse members' recovery by providing them with access to opportunities for employment, socialization, education, skill development, housing and improved wellness.

Background

Originally pioneered by a group of individuals in New York with lived experience of psychiatric disability in the 1940s, the clubhouse model is based on the premise that "community is therapy." Later, coming to be known as [Fountain House](#), the group emphasized mutual support and friendship, and offered connection to housing, jobs and recreational activities for those leaving institutional settings.

Fountain House subsequently developed the psychosocial rehabilitation approach known as, "social practice." Social practice recognizes that, in addition to clinical treatment, a sense of connection, dignity, meaningful participation in community and purpose is vital to the recovery of individuals with serious mental illness. Today, the clubhouse model has a broad national and international footprint. The model has been replicated more than 370 times in nearly 40 U.S. states and in 30 countries around the world.





What is a clubhouse?

[The clubhouse model](#) asserts that both work and meaningful relationships can promote recovery for people living with serious mental illness. Individuals are considered members, instead of patients or clients, and work together with staff to fulfill the daily tasks and responsibilities of operation, including shared decision-making. In a clubhouse, **the community itself is the primary therapeutic intervention**, complementing clinical care and other care that members receive outside of the clubhouse.

The clubhouse creates an **intentional community** that centers a **work-ordered day**, in which members and staff do meaningful work side-by-side, to help members learn new skills, build upon their natural talents and achieve their goals, all while fostering a sense of belonging and collective accomplishment.

The language of membership also emphasizes autonomy. Members may choose to work in the office, prepare meals in the kitchen, be the welcoming face at the reception area, or assist with groundskeeping, meetings, recording podcasts, or collaborate on other projects.

It is up to each individual to choose how they would like to contribute. Members are encouraged to try new things and step into leadership roles, all while supporting the common good.



Core features of the clubhouse model



Voluntary, lifetime membership

Clubhouse membership is free, voluntary and non-time limited, allowing individuals to engage as needs and goals evolve over time.



Shared leadership

Members share responsibility and leadership with staff. At clubhouses, teamwork is prioritized, and members are regarded as equal decision-makers.



Work-ordered day

Members and staff collaborate on daily operational tasks of the clubhouse. Each member determines their level of participation, choosing the activities they wish to engage in, and are supported in working towards their personal goals.



Non-clinical environment

Clubhouses complement, but do not provide clinical care. Staff are not therapists or case managers, and do not distribute or manage medications. Members are connected to crisis or treatment services when needed.



Holistic focus

Clubhouses support members in all areas of recovery, including connections to housing, employment, education, health and wellness, meals and community inclusion.





Outcomes

Research shows that people living with serious mental illness [find more stability, stronger relationships and greater well-being](#) when participating in the clubhouse model. During the first 12 to 18 months of participation, [58% of members who initially identified as having high levels of loneliness reported a reduction in loneliness](#). Clubhouses have also been

shown to [reduce inpatient hospitalizations and emergency room visits while increasing outpatient adherence](#). [Fountain House research](#) suggests that clubhouses not only improve people's lives but also make economic sense, saving an average of about \$11,000 per member per year compared with individuals who do not participate in the clubhouse model according to economic modeling.



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Implications for supportive housing practice

For supportive housing providers, clubhouses can fill a critical gap that housing and case management alone often does not address by offering sustained social connection, purposeful daily activity and pathways to employment and community participation.

In practice, providers can use clubhouse partnerships to strengthen referrals, expand recovery-oriented programming and give tenants an ongoing community-based setting that reinforces belonging, skill-building and long-term housing stability.



To find a clubhouse in your community, see: [Clubhouse Directory](#).

For more information on clubhouses, see: [Clubhouse Model](#).

Conclusion

The clubhouse model reframes recovery from serious mental illness as a social, relational and community-based process. Grounded in social practice, it emphasizes elements critical to long-term housing stability and well-being:

- **Belonging**
- **Dignity**
- **Contribution**

For organizations seeking stronger tenant outcomes, deeper community integration and a more complete recovery framework for people living with serious mental illness, collaborating with clubhouses is a high-value strategy.



About us



Corporation for Supportive Housing

Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) is a national nonprofit organization and Community Development Financial Institution. Our mission is to advance affordable housing aligned with services as an approach to help people thrive. We do this by advocating for effective policies and funding, investing in communities and strengthening the supportive housing field.



The National Center for Housing + Health

The National Center for Housing + Health (NCH+H), powered by CSH, is an innovative resource dedicated to advancing the alignment between affordable housing and healthcare. The Center brings together innovations, proven models and practical strategies and policies that help housing providers, healthcare organizations, policymakers and community and system leaders work better together — and make a bigger difference for people and communities.



Fountain House

For nearly 80 years, Fountain House has been a beacon of hope and recovery for people living with serious mental illness. Through our direct service clubhouse programs in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as national policy, advocacy and research initiatives, we have transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people living with serious mental illness.

Founded in 1948 in New York City, Fountain House originated the clubhouse model of community mental health that has been replicated more than 370 times in nearly 40 U.S. states and in 30 countries around the world.